

Professor Tim Black's guidance when he first considered running for office. Last month, President Obama returned to the South Side to break ground on the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson. Although Professor Black's failing health didn't allow him to attend in person, it is a good bet that ceremony couldn't have happened without him.

Mr. President, I was blessed to know Tim Black. When Barack Obama, my Senate colleague from Illinois, was elected President, I was given a handful of tickets to the inauguration. The first name that came to my mind was Tim Black. He had to be there, and his wife Zenobia Johnson-Black, a personal friend who volunteered to drive me in my first Senate campaign. Zenobia is a wonderful person. She is an exciting driver, and we had many escapades together.

So I invited Tim and Zenobia to come and sit in the best seats that I had for the inauguration of Barack Obama, the first African-American President from the South Side of Chicago.

I was fortunate I knew Tim Black. I counted him as a friend. I was there sitting next to him at his 100th birthday party. It was a great night, and the man still had it all together and a great sense of humor.

Loretta and I send our condolences to his beloved wife of 40 years, Zenobia Johnson-Black, his daughter Ermetra, and his countless friends and students. A great man has left us. He will be missed.

FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

Mr. President, tomorrow, the Senate will vote on whether to protect free and fair elections in America.

A big question we have to ask in the U.S. Senate is whether the right to vote and free and fair elections are worth any of our time.

You see, the first vote we have here is what is known as a motion to proceed. It is a basic question in the Senate: You want to talk about something? Is it important enough for your time? You want to bring it up here and say a few words about the right to vote in America?

That is the first vote. I think it is pretty simple.

Why wouldn't we, at this moment in history, with everything that is going on, spend some time talking about the right to vote?

Senator McCONNELL, the Republican leader, says, no, we shouldn't take any time to discuss the right to vote in the United States of America. He and many of our Republican colleagues are threatening to use the age-old weapon against civil rights, the filibuster, to stop even a conversation on the floor of the U.S. Senate about the right to vote.

That would make it the third time this year that Senate Republicans have used the filibuster to kill voting rights legislation. They filibustered For the People Act twice this year after it passed the House. They said then they

support voting rights, but not that voting rights bill. They said more compromise was needed. You can't reach compromise on anything until you talk about it.

We are going to have a motion to proceed to talk about voting rights on the floor of the Senate tomorrow. If they want to offer a compromise, if they want to get into a conversation or debate, that is the moment.

This empty Chamber—I wonder sometimes why we leave it the way it is. This would be a great meeting hall. We could rent it out for wedding receptions and have something productive happen on the floor of the U.S. Senate. But instead, this empty Chamber, day after day, finds ways to avoid the important issues of our time. That is sad.

There are very few of us who have been given this great honor and opportunity to serve in the Senate. We are supposed to come and talk about the things that matter in America.

Isn't the right to vote one of the most important things that matters in this country?

The Freedom to Vote Act is a compromise itself. It is based on a set of principles offered by Senator MANCHIN of West Virginia. Now, Senator MANCHIN has not concealed the fact that he didn't agree with the original bill, but in fairness to him, he sat down in good faith and bargained a compromised bill. He has worked exhaustively for months with Democrats, Republicans, and Independents to find some common ground. I salute him for that. That is what we all should be doing.

The Freedom to Vote Act includes reasonable national standards for a voter ID in States that require identification for in-person voting. Now, that is a big concession from the Democratic side because, although many of our States have a photo voter ID requirement, many do not, and we believe in some cases in the past it has been abused.

With the fundamental concept of a voter ID, I don't have any objection to, as long as it is managed and administered fairly. That is what we are setting out to do.

If our Republican colleagues are really worried about election integrity and making sure voters are who they say they are, wouldn't you think that they would at least vote to start the debate on the Freedom to Vote Act? That we would have a conversation in this empty Chamber that might even attract a handful of Senators on both sides of the aisle to talk about the right to vote in America in the year 2021 and beyond?

That just seems so basic.

Well, what the Republicans say is the Freedom to Vote Act is much more than just a debate topic; it is a Federal takeover of our elections.

That simply is not the case. The Freedom to Vote Act does not create any undue burden on any State. Instead, it sets reasonable, minimum

standards for voting access in all States, including automatic and same-day voter registration, 2 weeks of early voting, no-excuse mail-in voting. It establishes election day as a Federal holiday.

(Mr. PADILLA assumed the Chair.)

All of these proposals are consistent with the clear language of the Constitution. It will protect nonpartisan election officials from undue pressure and prevent politicians from overturning elections if they don't agree with voters' choices.

The Freedom to Vote Act makes it harder for billionaires and powerful corporations to buy elections. Let's be real honest, Members of Congress and others who run for office and set out to raise money, but the important fundraising is taking place in a mystery, in secret, with dark money that comes into an election with no indication of its source.

The Freedom to Vote Act is going to prevent the flow of foreign money into U.S. elections. Is there anybody who wants to argue for the premise that we should allow foreigners to invest in our election results or to try to influence the electorate, sometimes with misinformation and outright lies? I don't think they have any business interfering in our elections. I think most Americans agree with that. That is what the Freedom to Vote Act says.

In addition to that, dark money needs to get out of politics. If you want to stand up and support a candidate, so be it. But for goodness' sake, say who you are; identify yourself; let the American people know who is pushing one candidate or the other.

Organizations engaged in political spending will be required to tell the public who is giving them how much money. That is pretty simple, pretty obvious. There was a time when that level of disclosure was supported by the Republican minority leader in the Senate. I remember his speeches well on floor of the Senate. He shifted 180 degrees on the topic now.

Last fall, 2020, Americans braved a pandemic to vote in record numbers, but supporters of the former President nonetheless exhausted legal challenges and recounts seeking to validate the outrageous lie of election fraud, and their efforts went nowhere. Former President Trump went to 50 or 60 different courts to argue that Joe Biden didn't win the election. He couldn't produce a shred of evidence. All he had were the ramblings and gossip and fake news, if you will, on the internet. It didn't work.

Rudy Giuliani came up with some hair-brained schemes on behalf of President Trump: "Italy-gate," that somehow the Italians had satellites that controlled America's voting machinery. Ridiculous things.

When that didn't work, the former President decided he would just take over the Department of Justice. Our Judiciary Committee, which I serve on, Mr. President, went into extensive investigation of that and came up with

detailed information, which we released to the public 2 weeks ago. And the Republicans were in on all of our investigation. They were invited to question the witnesses, to be present, to even see our majority report in advance.

We wanted to make this bipartisan and fair, and we did. And what we found was the President's failed attempt to take over the Department of Justice—to force them to go to the States and say: Don't validate the 2020 election.

A few people stood up and showed courage at the Department of Justice and said they were prepared to resign before they bent to President Trump's pressure, and that was a fact.

That is what we are faced with now—this former President still marketing his lies across America about the outcome of the 2020 election, and we will not even take the time to discuss elections and voting. The Republicans will stop us with a filibuster.

Many politicians in many States continue to use the Big Lie of the stolen election to try to make it harder for citizens to vote in future elections.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, 19 States passed 33 bills to make it harder for citizens to vote, so far this year.

Hundreds of similar bills have been proposed in 49 States. These laws and proposals are a dagger at the heart of America's democracy.

The Freedom to Vote Act, which we want to start the conversation on, just the conversation and debate on tomorrow, is America's democracy defense act.

I want to commend the bill's sponsors: Senator AMY KLOBUCHAR. I don't know anybody who has worked harder than she has as chair of the Senate Rules Committee; Senator MANCHIN, he has been involved in the compromise; Senators TIM KAINE, ANGUS KING, and Rev. RAPHAEL WARNOCK.

And particularly I want to acknowledge our majority leader, CHUCK SCHUMER, for his leadership in this effort. He has worked hard at it, trying to bring this matter before the American people and on the floor.

We have also been engaged in a similar process on an equally critical piece of legislation, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

I have been here long enough to remember a time when the Voting Rights Act came before the U.S. Senate and got 98 votes—virtually all the Democrats, all the Republicans voted for it. No controversy. They believed that this product of the 1960s civil rights debate was fair. It said that in certain States with a proven history of discrimination against minority voters, when they proposed changes in election laws, we would examine them, preclear them, as they say.

The Supreme Court tossed out that section, and we have tried to restore it. I think the Supreme Court was wrong and maybe even naive in believing that

voter discrimination could not take place in the future.

When there was a voter suppression law passed in North Carolina and it was taken to a Federal court, the court said, and I paraphrase: They worked with “surgical precision” to violate the voting rights of minority voters.

The Freedom to Vote Act is the first of two crucial steps to take what our friend and colleague John Lewis said is a “precious, almost sacred” right, and I hope we take similar action on the Voting Rights soon.

Like the Freedom to Vote Act, the Voting Rights Act extension that Ronald Reagan signed in 1982 was the result of a compromise. In signing it, President Reagan said the final bill “prove[d] that differences can be settled in good will and good faith.”

Wouldn't that be nice to have that happen on this empty floor of the Senate tomorrow? That is all we ask of our Senate colleagues. Don't use the filibuster, the weapon of Jim Crow, to abet the attacks we are seeing on Americans' voting rights.

Offer amendments if you like, but work with us in good will and good faith to protect the voting rights which so many have sacrificed for.

INFLATION

Mr. President, the Republican minority leader came to the floor a few minutes ago and once again spoke about inflation. And of course we are concerned about it, and we are watching it closely.

We are in an unusual place where we are recovering from a pandemic and the economy is getting back on its feet. And, yes, there are problems. We see supply chain problems addressed by President Biden just this week. We know things are stacked up trying to get into the United States.

That was possibly unavoidable in the midst of a pandemic, when customer demand cratered, and now it is recovering and our demand outstrips the supplies that are flowing into our country.

But I also want to remind the Republican leader from Kentucky that his opposition to extend the debt ceiling, unfortunately, is also a problem when it comes to inflation. If there is uncertainty as to whether this Nation will pay its just debts, obviously that will be reflected in the financial markets and higher interest rates. So the strategy of Senator MCCONNELL, when it comes to the debt ceiling, is pro-inflationary itself.

Also, he talks about the “socialist spending spree” of the reconciliation bill, Build Back Better. And he says in critical terms that the Democrats argue that the cost of this will be “zero dollars.” He says that what Democrats don't say is they have to impose massive tax hikes for this to happen.

Well, I might say to the Senator from Kentucky, we have been very open about what our tax policy would be to pay for Build Back Better.

That policy would say those making over \$400,000 a year in income would

have to pay higher taxes. Yes, we have said it. Those people would have to pay higher taxes. And corporations that are escaping their just tax liability would now have to pay their fair share, too. In those two instances, we are raising taxes, but the taxes don't touch the working people in this country or those in lower income categories.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. President, he says—these are his words—Democrats are waging a war on affordable energy. I want to just reflect on the words “affordable energy.” It is true that we have ample energy resources in most places in America, but to argue that they are affordable is to fail to take into account what the costs of climate change are in America and around the world.

It is not affordable for us to have so many greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuels that we are creating extreme weather events all across the world. And we have seen them here in the United States. We have seen the fires in your State of California and in the Northwest; we have seen the flooding all across the country, including the Midwest; we have seen violent weather occurring at times of the year when historically it never occurs; and we are paying a heavy price for climate change, global warming, and the fact that we are so dependent on fossil fuels.

So when the Democrats—it used to be another bipartisan issue—and it no longer is—but when the Democrats sound the alarm about climate change and global warming, it is because current energy sources are not affordable in terms of the future of our planet. We have to find a better way.

I am sorry to see so many current politicians unable or unwilling to accept their responsibility to change this country and the world for the better and to leave an Earth, a planet, an environment that our kids can live in. I don't think that is too much to ask, and I think we ought to do our part.

IRS

Mr. President, the last thing Senator MCCONNELL went into this morning was giving new powers to the IRS to snoop.

Well, I guess that is true in some respects. We believe that people who owe taxes ought to pay them, and the vast majority of American families are honest; they want to do their civic duty. They file their taxes on time and try to pay every penny they are supposed to—not more, but every penny they are supposed to.

And yet there are many hiding their assets, hiding their profits, hiding their revenues, and hiding their money from the IRS. They should be held accountable.

Why should the average American family be held to a higher standard of honesty than the richest people in this country? I think it is only fair that everyone be held to the same standard.